

## **BEE GEES FEVER RENEWED WITH NEW POLYDOR/A&M SET** (Billboard, May 24, 1997)

Thank you Juan Cristobal! ;)

The fever is back.

Taking retail, their label Polygram, and even the group members by surprise, the long-lived Bee Gees have stormed onto The Billboard 200 this issue at No. 11 with their new Polydor/A&M album "Still waters"

According to SoundScan, first-week sales reached 65,558 albums, with a strong mix of baby-boomers and their children at the cash register.

"You've got moms in their 40s and their teenage kids liking this record - and these kids weren't even born when 'Saturday Night Fever' was out," says Jordan Berliant, VP of sales for the band's Left Bank Management. "It's clear you don't sell these kinds of numbers for such an act without it being multigenerational. This represents the leading edge of a phenomenon in the music industry, a rare example where an act still appeals to its original audience, with a surprisingly high popularity among younger demographics."

According to the Recording Industry Assn. of America, the percentage of record buyers aged 40-44 -representing a core of the baby boomer era- has nearly doubled over the past decade. Consumers 15-19 years old, however, have dropped from 24.2% to 17.2% as a percentage of total record buyers.

That's not to say teens aren't buying music. On The Billboard 200, the No. 1 album this issue is "Spice", a favorite among young audiences. Entering at No. 9 is the debut album from teen and preteen group Hanson, whose No. 1 Hot 100 single, "Mmmmbop," is another youth-appeal record.

And retail comments point toward a good amount of teen interest in the Bee Gees. In conversation with Left Bank, Daniel Fullen, store manager of Camelot Music in Charleston, W.Virginia, said, "We're selling a lot more to younger fans, to 15- and 16-year-old girls. We sold out of our initial spread by the day after release. We just got in our second order, and they are half gone. It's crazy."

Vinnie Birbiglia, senior buyer for Trans World Entertainment Corporation, adds that the company has seen action from people of all ages, drawing top five sales over the past week for the chain.

SoundScan reports top 10 sales in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, and top five sales in Miami and Cleveland.

For Polygram Group Distribution president/CEO Jim Caparro, such statistics, he admits, came as a bit of a shock. "The band delivered a terrific record, and everyone got juiced from that, but to say we were expecting 65,000 records sold in the first week -no. It shows that great music doesn't die."

And for band member Barry Gibb: "We were stunned, absolutely. We would have been happy to enter the charts at 100. The idea of actually reaching the public in the U.S. is a new one for us."

Gibb says that despite long-lived success in Europe (where "Still Waters" reached No. 4 among albums on the Eurochart), the U.S. has been tough to break into after the stigma of "Saturday Night Fever."

"There were Top 40 stations that wouldn't even listen to -much less play- a Bee Gees record. That's censorship," Gibb says. "But we've come to terms with the fact that we never fully will be able to move away from that period."

"Still Waters" (Music to My Ears, Billboard, Feb. 15) already is the band's highest-reaching non-sound-track album since its "Greatest Hits" reached No. 1 on The Billboard 200 18 years ago. The Bee Gees' last effort, 1993's "Size Isn't Everything," peaked at No. 153. "Now we've gotten four Lifetime Achievement Awards in the last five months," Gibb says of the change of fortune. "You can't plan for that. It seems like it's just a time for us, with the whole culture obsessed with the 70's. Young people are wanting to live through what they didn't the first time."

In addition to theories that they now appeal to a multigenerational audience, a key element in the Bee Gees' No. 11 debut this issue has undoubtedly been the band's astonishing amount of television visibility.

Over the past few months, the Bee Gees have made the rounds, hitting everything from "Late Show With David Letterman" and "Tonight Show With Jay Leno" to "Oprah," "The Rosie O'Donnell Show," "CBS This Morning," CNN, "Access Hollywood," and perhaps foremost, VH1.

In March, the adult-targeted video network premiered the Bee Gees on its hourlong "Storytellers" series, featuring the group in a casual, acoustic setting, followed later in the month by the debut of the video for the first single from "Still Waters," "Alone," in large rotation. In April, VH1 aired a Bee Gees video collection, while VJs talked up the band's anticipated comeback. This month, the Gibb brothers were featured as the VH1 artist of the month.

"In an era with a lot of artists coming and going quickly, the Bee Gees step back into the picture not only with a great history, but with some incredible new songs," says John Sykes, president of VH1. "Their success shows the power of the marketplace when something is given the proper visibility. It's like they have been released from disco prison, and people are rediscovering what incredible songwriters and performers they are -not only people in their 30s and 40s, but those in their 20s seeing what talent they have."

And for the first time in years, radio has also backed a Bee Gees project. "Alone" is the Airpower pick on Billboard's Adult Contemporary chart, up from No. 22 top No. 17 this issue.

"These guys are icons. We look at this as a great record from a superstar group," says Mark Edwards, PD of WLIT Chicago, which has the song in heavy rotation. "There are very few artists that within the first bar, you know whi it is. You play this song and instantly know it's the Bee Gees."

Adds Jeff Sydney, COO for Left Bank, "It just shows that if you find enough channels to communicate music to the public for their evaluation, the public gets the chance to cast its vote."

The single, which will be released commercially Tuesday (20) and thus become eligible for the Hot 100 Singles chart, debuts this issue at No. 72 on Hot 100 Airplay. Signs point to continuing momentum as the Bee Gees prepare to launch a major U.S. tour in the fall.

Says Ed Thomas, VP of media and publicity for Left Bank, "It's rare you have an artist with such a history that's still current. The Bee Gees aren't just a great nostalgia artist; they still want to create new music."

"We're just proud that we've been able to stay around as long as we have," adds Gibb. "When you consider that the average life span of a group is five years, no one is more amazed than we are."